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From: Enck, Judith
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Residents voice more health concerns at update meeting on tainted Newburgh water

Monday

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By Leonard Sparks

Times Herald-Record

CITY OF NEWBURGH – For City of Newburgh resident Essie Bennett, the list of ailments is long and strange.

The spot doctors found on lungs that have never known cigarette smoke or alcohol. The high cholesterol. And then, a few years ago, the aching bones.

In May, the city may have provided an answer: high levels of perfluorooctane sulfonate in Washington Lake, Newburgh's primary water supply.

"I'm very concerned," Bennett said. "All the problems I have ... I think it's the water."

Anguish, fear and uncertainty emerged from the roughly 200 people who came to Mount Saint Mary College on Monday for an update on Newburgh's water contamination, which became public on May 2 when the city closed Washington Lake due to PFOS levels.

The meeting, which featured a panel of federal, state and city officials, came one week after the state Department of Health finally said it would begin a blood testing program in Newburgh after months of pleas.

And it was testing and questions about PFOS' health effects that occupied the minds of those in attendance.

"I got enough answers, but I don't think the right questions were asked," said Corey Allen, who believes the contamination may have caused the stomach cancer that led to his mother's death in 2013.

"The right questions are, 'Is it going to kill us?' and 'Is it going to kill us?'"

Newburgh's water contamination is believed tied to the use of PFOS-containing firefighting

foams at Stewart Air National Guard Base.

A retention pond at Stewart drains into Silver Stream, whose waters have been used to supplement the lake.

The chemical is considered linked to a number of ailments, including kidney cancer, high cholesterol and low infant birth weights.

Already, the state Department of Health has instituted testing programs for two Rensselaer County municipalities – Hoosick Falls and Petersburg. Both have water supplies polluted by perfluorooctanoic acid, a sister chemical to PFOS.

Nathan Graber, director of DOH's Center for Environmental Health, told Newburgh residents that his department has already begun reaching out to community groups and local health officials as it lays the groundwork for the testing of city residents.

A sign-up sheet was circulated at the meeting for residents interested in having their blood tested, and Graber publicized an email address – beoe@health.ny.gov – residents can use to request testing. People can also call 518-402-7950, he said.

Orange County Legislator Chris Eachus suggested the department consider expanding testing beyond the city.

Eachus is a former teacher for the Newburgh School District, where students from the Towns of Newburgh and New Windsor have used fountains fed by city water for years.

"You need to stretch a lot wider than what you've been talking about at this point," he said.

A DEC chart is shown of the retention pond at Stewart Air National Guard Base believed to be linked to contaminated water affecting Newburgh, during Monday night's update meeting at Mount Saint Mary College. KELLY MARSH/FOR THE TIMES HERALD-RECORD

MID-HUDSON NEWS

9/19/2016

Citizen concerns mount over Newburgh water contamination

NEWBURGH – Residents of Newburgh left a lengthy session concerning PFOS-contaminated drinking water late Monday night more confused and frustrated than before.

A panel of experts from the state departments of Environmental Conservation, Health and Transportation and federal EPA, along with local environmental organization representatives, and city officials, was assumed to be the forum for an announcement on the free blood-testing of residents. However, many found the hearing that was meant to be for public input, overrun by technical jargon and redundant presentations; leaving very little time for public input and leaving many attendees more confused about the crisis than when they arrived.

The DEC announced the investigation they have been conducting yielded the primary source of contamination coming from the Stewart Eastern Airfield Drain, measuring 5,900 parts per trillion of carcinogenic PFOS. They also announced a minimal contamination in Washington Lake's soil, leaving no need for dredging, no PFOS in Brown's Pond, a \$2.4 million commitment to New York City to pay for Newburgh's tap of the Catskill Aqueduct, full funding of treatment systems for the city's water supply.

On the other hand, news regarding the anticipated blood-testing announcement, which residents were able to sign up for at the hearing, was not received as comprehensively as the public had thought.

Director of the Center for Environmental Health for the state Health Department, Dr. Nathan Graber, said the bio-monitoring program they plan to launch would essentially test blood, collect information on risk factors associated with exposure to residents, as well as people who are concerned about their exposure, and provide that information back to the community so there can be an understanding of the exposure to PFOS from drinking water.

The panel included city officials the state DEC and federal EPA

Graber added that a PFOS blood-test is highly specialized, not one that a doctor's office can conduct, that it's a test limited to analysis from only a few labs in the country, only one in New York, and that if more people than expected signed up for the program, they would look to their federal partners to help cover the cost.

Councilman Torrance Harvey said that information was crucial to the public he represents. The lack of concrete information shows him it is not a priority for the state and governor.

"They keep skirting around it; so, this second meeting, a lot of people wanted to know the date, the time, and the location for the free blood testing and they still have not provided us that," said Harvey. "That's a problem for me because our constituents are constantly calling us up saying when, where and how are we going to get this testing done."

The meeting was a "bit of a tease" to City Manager Michael Ciaravino, who said after the session the city wants a clean Washington Lake back.

"This has really consumed the community in a way that is starting to build, particularly as it relates to the health effects from this problem; so, we want to get this behind us and we want to be able to do the health effects testing, we want not only the state Superfund designation, but I've asked for the EPA to consider a federal Superfund designation as well," he said.

Ciaravino added that they will be changing the format of the next hearing, occurring in November at the Newburgh Armory, to allow for minimal presentation and more public input.

Residents of the city, or outlying towns potentially affected by the PFOS crisis, who want to join in the bio-monitoring program, should contact beoe@health.ny.gov, or 518-402-7950.

PHOTO A state contractor has filter trucks on site, to treat water as it is drawn from Washington Lake

DOH monitoring Newburgh residents for PFOS

BY WRGB STAFF

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 19TH 2016

NEWBURGH -- New York's Department of Health is kicking off a comprehensive biomonitoring program to keep an eye on the health of residents in Newburgh.

The department will soon be taking blood samples from a cross-section of area residents.

A state of emergency was declared there this spring, after the chemical PFOS was discovered in two bodies of water.

The chemical is similar to PFOA, which has been found in several communities' water sources.

WNYT

In-Depth: How safe is the chemical replacing PFOA?

September 19, 2016 06:45 PM

The toxic chemical, PFOA, that contaminated the water supply in Hoosick Falls and Petersburg was phased out last year.

However, the new chemical that supposedly replaced it may not be any safer and it's shrouded in secrecy.

Almost anything that is stained or water repellent has some kind of chemical to make it happen. For years that substance was PFOA or something slightly similar.

"PFOA and the other perfluorinated compounds are used in so many consumer products, in that regard alone it becomes global," noted Dr. David Carpenter with the UAlbany environmental sciences department.

Teflon, microwave popcorn bags, stain resistant clothing, even your iWatch wristband all coated with it. It's also in the air you breathe.

Carpenter says PFOA is present even in places you wouldn't expect.

"I've got a study in northern Alaska with a very remote, two remote Alaskan villages. The people there have PFOA in their body," he pointed out.

Dr. Carpenter says PFOA is extraordinarily tough to destroy in the environment. It could be around long after humans are extinct.

It's been linked to cancer and other illnesses. The health effects of PFOA came to light more than a decade ago after drinking water was contaminated in West Virginia and Ohio. The company that used it, DuPont, was hit with lawsuits.

More recently, the chemical was discovered in the drinking water in Hoosick Falls and Petersburg, two communities where manufacturers Saint Gobain And Taconic Inc. Had used the toxic chemical.

Last year, the industry was forced to phase it out.

"It's been PFOA and PFOS that's been discontinued, but not the related chemicals that have not been studied so much," noted Carpenter.

He says the industry is very secretive about what they used to replace PFOA and it's hard to figure out exactly what they are. He says the new chemicals could be just as dangerous as PFOA.

They're not saying what they replaced it with. It's almost certain that these are perfluorinated compounds with slightly different structures that have not been studied anywhere near the degree that these more commonly version of perfluorinated compounds have been.

NewsChannel 13 contacted DuPont. A spokesperson says the company's new chemical is called ammonium 2,3,3,3-tetrafluoro-2 propanoate -- they generally call it polymerization processing aid or ppa. DuPont says extensive health and safety studies were conducted. The chemical, ppa, is registered and approved with the EPA and other international environmental agencies.

Saint Gobain did not disclose its replacement for PFOA. A company spokesperson says they never manufactured the chemical, nor its replacement.

As for the U.S. EPA, the agency's been reviewing more than 300 alternatives to PFOA. Its researchers have already found one replacement substance in a river in West Virginia near DuPont.

EPA officials said, "There are many reasons to expect a range of toxicities. But more research is needed, particularly on the environmental fate of these compounds to fully evaluate these compounds."

There are more than 17,000 secret chemicals registered with the EPA, according to their own scientists.

The Toxic Substance Control Act was recently reformed. Under the new law, the EPA has the authority to fully evaluate existing chemicals.

RINGWOOD CLEANUP WON'T GET ON BALLOT

09/16/2016

Record & Herald News, The

Ringwood voters will not get the chance to decide whether 166,000 tons of contaminated soil will be excavated from the Ford Superfund site or left in place, after a judge ruled Friday that a proposed ballot question by residents was invalid.

Passaic County Assignment Judge Ernest Caposela said the 244-word question calling for the excavation of the pollution was so "unintelligible" that it would confuse the average voter.

"I can't rewrite the question," he said near the end of an hourlong hearing in his Paterson courtroom. "I can't provide an explanatory statement."

The judge said that if the ballot question was approved by voters on Election Day, it would have breached a contract between the borough and Ford Motor Co. that would cost local taxpayers millions of dollars.

Ringwood Cares, a group of residents who wrote the ballot question, said it would appeal Caposela's decision -- a move that would have to be done quickly because Passaic County prints Election Day ballots on Sept. 29.

Those who say the pollution must be hauled away to ensure public health are opposed by the Borough Council and others who say placing an asphalt barrier over the pollution will limit residents' exposure and avoid a multimillion-dollar cleanup bill for taxpayers.

The pollution dates back almost 50 years to when contractors for Ford dumped paint sludge and other industrial waste from its former Mahwah plant next to a low-income neighborhood in the mountains of Upper Ringwood.

Along with Ford, the borough is liable to pay for a portion of the cleanup because Ringwood officials allowed the dumping to occur in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Removing the contamination would cost \$32.6 million. The borough supports a cheaper \$5.4 million plan that would place an asphalt barrier over the pollution with a new recycling center on top at the O'Connor Disposal Area.

The borough has a 2011 agreement with Ford that requires the auto giant to pay for 85 percent of the capping plan while the borough's insurance carriers would pick up 15 percent, resulting in little to no taxpayer dollars going to the project, town officials said.

But if the ballot question was passed as is by voters on Nov. 8, the contract with Ford would be invalid.

The town could be sued for breach of contract because Ringwood Cares did not challenge it in time under state law, Caposela said.

"How can I let the public invalidate a valid contract?" the judge said, later adding that "the cost of that would have to be shouldered by the taxpayers."

Under law, residents had 45 days to challenge the contract after it was approved by the Borough Council, said Mark Semeraro, the borough's attorney.

Didn't know of pact

Ringwood Cares member Ryan Bolton argued the group's case Friday, saying the group did not know of a contract between the borough and Ford until this year. He said that most borough residents are familiar enough with the issue that they would have no problem understanding the ballot question.

Bolton said benzene, arsenic and other hazardous materials would pose an unacceptable health risk if left at the site, a former dumping ground off Peters Mine Road. He questioned the Environmental Protection Agency's assertion that the capping plan would be just as protective of the public's health as excavation.

"They were the same agency that assured the air at Ground Zero was fine," Bolton said.

Ringwood Cares has not been able to hire an attorney or find one to work pro bono. Ringwood was represented by two lawyers on Friday; Ford brought two.

The case was set in motion in July, when residents submitted a proposed ordinance to the borough with more than 300 signatures to block the recycling center project. Ringwood is one of more than 100 towns in New Jersey that allow residents to propose their own ordinances. Because the council did not act on the proposed ordinance, state law stipulates that it automatically goes before voters on the Nov. 8 ballot.

The borough filed a lawsuit last month to block the ballot question, saying it was too vague and could not be enforced if approved by voters. Supporters maintain the wording is fine, but say the issue should be put to voters, no matter how the question is worded.

Borough Manager Scott Heck and Mayor John Speer would not comment after the ruling. Semeraro, representing the borough, would only say that his clients "are happy with the result."

EPA officials also would not comment on the matter. A spokesman would only reiterate that the agency felt the capping and recycling center plan are "protective of public health and the environment."

Despite his ruling, Caposela complimented Bolton for his "eloquent" arguments and Ringwood Cares for its efforts.

"Some of us live in towns where people just don't care," Caposela said. "I would feel pretty good living in Ringwood, knowing there is an organization trying to keep the Ringwood [municipal government] on their toes."

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